

**CHARLES TAYLOR MASTER
MECHANIC'S AWARD**

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2003**

JOHN KRUSE



KRUSE, John. John Kruse was born on April 24, 1934. He was a very private man and not much is known about his life before he moved to Alaska. What we do know is that he spent the first 20-25 years of his career in the Lower 48 maintaining agricultural and other small aircraft. When he moved up to Alaska, he worked for Lee Pete, owner of North Pole Air Service, as well as Arctic Guides in Barrow, before joining Cape Smythe Air Service in Barrow, Alaska.

Cape Smythe Air Service was founded in the mid-1970's by Joe Phelder and Tom Brauer. Joe was a pilot who owned an airline called Phen-Air in Barrow, Alaska. Tom Brauer was a businessman who owned Cape Smythe Whaling and Trading Company, also in Barrow. The two became partners when Joe ended up owing Tom a lot of money and gave him part of the airline in exchange for his debts. Eventually Tom decided that if he was going to own an interest in the airline, he wanted to get more involved. The two of them teamed up with three other people, including a retired Alaska Airlines pilot, a teacher, and a preacher. Each of these individuals possessed pieces of knowledge necessary to put an airline together. They changed the name of the airline to Cape Smythe Air

Service and in 1977 they incorporated. Joe Phelder eventually bowed out of the company and Tom took over. One of the first things he did was hire John Kruse as the first aircraft mechanic working for Cape Smythe.

John worked for Cape Smythe Air Service as the Director of Maintenance in Barrow, Alaska until transferring to Nome in the early to mid-1990's. During this period, he trained Tom Nicoles to take over as the Director of Maintenance in Barrow, while he took on the role of Chief Inspector and Manager of the Kotzebue, Nome, and Barrow Stations.

When asked about John, people remember a hard-working, experienced mechanic, who dedicated his life to improving the quality of aviation. People describe him as a "great guy, honest, straight-forward, but not afraid to speak his mind!" They also remember him as someone who would pitch right in and help out whenever he was needed.

One former employee remembers being a new pilot for Cape Smythe and checking out the weather in Savoonga. He said that the weather didn't look too good and he was debating whether or not to go and "take a look" when he saw John standing next to him. John asked him if he had ever flown to Savoonga before. When the pilot replied "no," John looked at him and said, "Well, if you've never been there before, you're not going to go today!" The pilot was told to go back to his hotel room and the flight was cancelled.

People say that this was very typical of John. He was conservative and felt very

strongly about safety and doing things right. He demanded excellence from his employees, but would stand behind them and support them when needed. People remember that his planes were always well kept and meticulously maintained.

Throughout the years, John maintained a variety of aircraft including the Twin Otter, CE-207, CE-185, Piper Navajo, and a variety of old Piper and Cessna aircraft.

When not working, John was an avid reader of non-fiction literature and had an extensive book collection. He also enjoyed collecting guns, listening to classical music, and driving to new places.

John will always be remembered by his many friends and by his "Cape Smythe family." His unexpected death in September of 2002, from complications of diabetes, left a large void in the aviation community, and he will be sorely missed.